

## ARTICLES

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### *PICTURE POSTCARDS AS RECORDERS OF THE CHANGING CULT OF LENIN, 1918-1930*

In this essay I will examine the relationship between picture postcards – a widely used yet under-studied form of visual material – and the development of the cult of Lenin. Russian revolutionaries had long familiarity with postcards, using them for propaganda, fundraising and correspondence prior to the revolution. After the revolution, and despite his own dislike of such publicity, Lenin's image became a staple of the popular postcard format, serving as a legitimizing force for the regime. The first images, which appeared in the wake of Fania Kaplan's 1918 attempted assassination of Lenin, connected his personal history with the history of the revolution. They marked him as a key figure in the revolutionary movement and underscored his present importance as a political leader. Moreover, as I briefly outline in a discussion of the postal distribution system, picture postcards with Lenin's image had the potential to reach people across the country, thereby exposing them to the same narrative regarding Lenin's centrality to the regime.

With Lenin's death in 1924, his image took on new political meaning. I explore those changes in Lenin's depiction on postcards through the 1920s, and the meaning of those changes for the emerging cult of Lenin. At the time of his death, Lenin's image was used to counter possible political instability and to unite the country in mourning. Picture postcards not only celebrated Lenin's life but, by popularizing images of his funeral, allowed the Soviet government to turn it into a mass participatory event – one that embraced even those who were far from Moscow on the actual day. As other picture postcards of Lenin's Mausoleum demonstrate, Lenin's cult then acquired a spatial component that connected his body to Red Square, the traditional locus of power in Russian history. The final section of this essay examines the downgrading of the Lenin cult in the mid to late 1920s. When picture postcards were issued after 1926, they emphasized Lenin's removal from the active political scene. Soviet citizens were now far more likely to use a postcard featuring a

statue of Lenin or a building named in his honor than a portrait of him. The change stemmed from the Party debates concerning the future of the New Economic Policy (NEP) as well as the marginalization of key supporters of the Lenin cult like Lev Kamenev and Grigorii Zinoviev. Attaching their political fortunes to Lenin's image was not a successful tactic and, as Stalin consolidated his position, he felt no need to promote someone else's leadership cult.

### Picture postcards and Russian revolutionary culture

Picture postcards had already played a number of roles in Russia's revolutionary movement and were familiar items to those who opposed the Tsarist regime. The authorities often restricted political prisoners to postcards for communicating with their families. Friends and relatives in return sent picture postcards to their imprisoned loved ones in the belief that the images brightened the walls of their cells.<sup>1</sup> The idea that revolutionaries may have treasured individual postcards or even collected them need not seem strange, despite the ascetic lifestyles that they promoted and that are usually ascribed to them by historians. Surely the example of Lenin himself proves this point. We know from his wife Nadezhda Krupskaya's reminiscences that Lenin, while in Siberian exile in Shushenskoe, kept an album of postcards.<sup>2</sup> His collection included portraits of Emile Zola, Aleksandr Herzen, Dmitrii Pisarev, and Nikolai Chernyshevskii. On a less exalted note, Lenin also regularly sent postcards to his mother and sisters when he went on holiday.

Revolutionary groups relied on the sale of picture postcards featuring portraits of their heroes (like those collected by Lenin) to bolster their coffers. Long-time Bolshevik Elena Stasova recorded in her memoirs how the party's Finance Committee did just that by selling postcard portraits of Marx, Engels and Lassalle as well as other postcards that made explicit reference to the Bloody Sunday massacre.<sup>3</sup> During the 1905 Revolution, the Bolsheviks took advantage of a weakening in government censorship and opened a bookstore on Karavannaia Street in St. Petersburg.<sup>4</sup> The *Vpered* publishing venture openly sold socialist literature as well as picture postcards. Among its wares were reproductions of works of art depicting revolutionary scenes and portraits of such revolutionary

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1. David Skipton and Peter Michalove, *Postal Censorship in Imperial Russia* (Urbana, IL: John H. Otten, 1989), 1: 211.

2. V. V. Shleev and E. B. Fainshtein, *Khudozhestvennye otkrytki i ikh sobiranie* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva, 1960), p. 6.

3. E. D. Stasova, *Vospominaniia* (Moscow: Mysl', 1969), p. 49. Stasova gave her collection of postcards to the Lenin Museum in 1932.

4. Vladimir Bonch-Bruievich, *Bol'shevistskie izdatel'skie dela v 1905-1907 gg.* (Moscow: OGIZ, 1933), pp. 29 & 32.

luminaries as Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin and Nikolai Ogarev. By the time the bookstore was closed in July 1907, it had printed more than 120 different images in postcard form.<sup>5</sup> Its materials proved so popular and lucrative that they continued to circulate illegally for a number of years afterwards.

Picture postcards were an established medium of communication and propaganda in revolutionary circles. Their size was convenient. Smaller than posters or handbills, picture postcards could be collected and stored – even hidden if necessary – more easily than other kinds of visual materials. Their contents reflected a desire to create a different historical narrative from the one presented by the Tsarist state, which was also using picture postcards and other visual media as legitimizing forms of propaganda in this era.<sup>6</sup> By mythologizing figures in the revolutionary movement, picture postcards provided a key component in legitimizing revolutionary hero worship prior to 1917. Building on this legacy in the early Soviet era, picture postcards were issued in great numbers. I now turn to the position of postcards in one of that era's most important campaigns – the cult of Lenin.

### The first images of Lenin

Unlike their rivals the Socialist Revolutionaries, who had long relied on publicizing party leaders in their visual propaganda, the Bolsheviks were quite late in developing this kind of personality-driven material.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the February Revolution, the Bolsheviks produced images of heroes in the revolutionary movement but none of their current leaders. Nor did 1917 see an outpouring of Lenin-inspired images to match the picture postcards of leading SRs such as Aleksandr Kerensky, Mariia Spiridonova, and Ekaterina Breshko-Breshkovskaia that flooded the Russian market after the fall of the monarchy. Instead, the first Bolshevik postcards reproduced key articles from the front page of their organ *Izvestiia Petrogradskogo Soveta* and were designed to provide the masses with the latest news.

According to the research done by postcard collector Richard Bartmann, such postcards were printed by the firm "Council of Workers and

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5. Iakov M. Belitskii and Georgii N. Glazer, *Rasskazy ob otkrytkakh* (Moscow: Radio i Sviaz', 1986), p. 96.

6. See Alison Rowley, "Monarchy and the Mundane: Picture Postcards and Images of the Romanovs, 1890-1917," *Revolutionary Russia*, 22, no. 2 (2009): 125-5; and Richard Wortman, "Publicizing the Imperial Image in 1913," in *Self and Story in Russian History*, ed. L. Engelstein and S. Sandler (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2000).

7. On picture postcards and the SRs, see Alison Rowley, "Popular Culture and Visual Narratives of Revolution: Russian Postcards, 1905-1922," *Revolutionary Russia*, 21, no. 1 (2008): 1-31.

Soldiers.” While they were usually sold in kiosks and train stations, on other occasions they were given away free of charge, with the recipients being asked to pass them on or to hang them on walls for public display.<sup>8</sup> Later in the year, the Bolsheviks turned to producing postcards showing street scenes of the fighting that occurred in Moscow during their seizure of power.<sup>9</sup> The Bolsheviks also concentrated on other aspects of the revolutionary tradition, most notably the important ritual occasions presented by the funerals of fallen comrades.

According to Catherine Merridale, funerals, and the documentary-style picture postcards that they spawned, provided “an opportunity that no politician could ignore, a chance to claim the bodies for the cause and turn their blood into a sacrifice, a secular communion.”<sup>10</sup> After the October Revolution, the trend of commemorating funerals in postcard format continued for it allowed the new regime to lay claim to, and to create, new sacred spaces such as Red Square in Moscow or the Field of Mars in St. Petersburg. As historian James von Geldern notes in his study of Bolshevik festivals, “Public festivities help a political party claim legitimacy by occupying the city center (the seat of political power), decorating it with partisan symbols, and filling it with supporters.”<sup>11</sup> Revolutionary funerals were among the most important of these festivities. As will be discussed below, this emphasis on claiming spaces continued to be an important component in the cult of Lenin, one that found its way onto picture postcards.

Not until well into 1918 did the first Bolshevik postcards celebrate Lenin, as an individual and leader. Most followed in the wake of Fania Kaplan’s August 1918 attempted assassination of Lenin. Dmitri Volkogonov has observed that “This event suddenly brought home to the Party leadership just how much Lenin meant to them.”<sup>12</sup> Nina Tumarkin concurs that the attack “spurred the first major concentration of Leniniana and marked the first occasion on which Lenin evoked extravagant praise simultaneously from diverse sources.”<sup>13</sup> Postcards were part of that process. The Central Bureau for the Organization Celebrating the First Anni-

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8. Richard Bartmann, *Picture Postcard Encyclopedia of Russia* (Erlangen: Privately Printed, 1992), no page.

9. Examples of these postcards can be seen in I. Sarychev, “Moskva, 1917 goda,” *Filateliiia SSSR*, 3 (1967): 42.

10. Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (New York: Viking, 2000), p. 93.

11. James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1993), p. 45.

12. Dmitri Volkogonov, *Lenin* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 222.

13. Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), p. 80.

versary of the October Revolution (*Tsentral'nyi biuro po organizatsii prazdnstv godovschiny Oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii*) issued a series of postcards reminiscent of those that had circulated illegally in 1905. Portraits of Marx, Engels and Lassalle were now joined by a likeness of Lenin, thereby marking his entry into the pantheon of revolutionary thinkers and heroes.<sup>14</sup> This was not an isolated example. Those early Bolshevik postcards with Lenin's image began to equate Lenin's personal history with the overall narrative of the revolution. Portraits of Lenin soon began to be issued on a consistent basis even though the organizations and commercial ventures wishing to use Lenin's likeness were hampered to some extent by Lenin himself.

While there were obvious reasons to popularize his image with the masses (and thereby legitimize the regime), it was clear that Lenin disliked this kind of publicity. For instance, the absence of government and party leaders from Soviet postage stamps in the early 1920s resulted from Lenin's disapproval of the practice.<sup>15</sup> Lenin also disliked the amount of attention he received in the newspapers in the wake of the assassination attempt as well as the adulatory tone that was being used about him. According to Tumarkin, he sent three friends to the offices of *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* to communicate his distaste for such "personal" propaganda. Soon thereafter the publicity stopped.<sup>16</sup> In 1921 when artist Iurii Annenkov came to his Kremlin office to discuss plans for a portrait, Lenin intervened as Annenkov outlined his ideas for the composition. "But, excuse me, I am only a simple journalist", Lenin said. "I propose that in your portrait I be portrayed simply sitting at my writing desk."<sup>17</sup> Apart from this personal sense of modesty, Lenin might also have found it disconcerting to think of his picture on postcards, when he himself had once collected similar items depicting his revolutionary idols.

Despite Lenin's wishes, a number of manufacturers rushed Lenin postcards into production, usually reusing M. S. Nappel'baum's portraits of him. These photographs, taken at the Smolny Institute in January 1918, became among the most iconic and widely reproduced images of Lenin in his lifetime.<sup>18</sup> They enabled diverse manufacturers like the Moscow-based book publishing firm *Kommunist*; the publisher working for the Union of Communes of the Northern Oblasts (*Soiuz kommun Severnoi*

14. Shleev and Fainshtein, *Khudozhestvennye otkrytki i ikh sobiranie*, p. 14.

15. O.N. Bukharov, *Marki – svideteli istorii* (Moscow: Radio i sviaz', 1982), 30.

16. Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, p. 90. Comments Lenin made to Bonch-Bruевич criticizing the hagiographic tone used about him in the newspapers are included in E. Vittenberg, "Lenin protiv kulta Lenina," *Nauka i zhizn'*, 4 (1989):13.

17. Iurii Annenkov, "Vospominaniia o Lenine," *Novyi zhurnal*, 65 (1961): 139.

18. M. S. Nappel'baum's work, including the Lenin photographs, is discussed in David King, *Red Star over Russia* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009), pp. 42-43 & 204.

*oblasti*); and the Petrograd firm Ukrainian Commune (*Ukrainskaia kommuna*) to market Lenin materials.<sup>19</sup> The latter intended to distribute its wares across Ukraine but proved unable to do so owing to the problems created by the civil war.

The purpose of these postcards was informational. At a time when few people understood the new language used by the government or recognized its leaders, it was crucial to establish some kind of link with the population, particularly beyond the major urban centers.<sup>20</sup> The re-establishment of a functioning postal system was a significant part of that process. To encourage people to use the mail again, the government allowed personal letters and postcards to be sent free of charge from 1 January 1919 to 15 August 1921. That policy resulted in a 34 percent increase in the volume of mail sent.<sup>21</sup> That increase contributed to the emerging cult of Lenin in the 1920s. As the postal system was reorganized and expanded, it allowed for postcards of Lenin to penetrate even into remote areas of the country. In 1924, the so-called “circular post” system was established. Its horse-drawn carts were driven along regular routes delivering all kinds of mail. At each stopping point, the driver set up shop in a local building (often the village school) and for an hour or so distributed mail and sold postal supplies, including postcards, to villagers. The network eventually encompassed 275,000 km. By the end of 1925 it had 4,279 routes and 43,103 stopping points.<sup>22</sup> Larger stopping points eventually turned into post offices, staffed by permanent postal employees and, in 1930, home delivery of mail was introduced. Thanks to picture postcards, Lenin’s image and the emerging cult associated with it, circulated via the recovered Soviet postal system.

These early Lenin postcards frequently provided basic information about the major events in Lenin’s life prior to the Bolshevik seizure of power. One Gosizdat postcard, for example, had Lenin’s signature as well as the date 31 January 1918 included below his picture. The reverse side outlined Lenin’s organizational work in the years leading up to the revo-

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19. On the first two manufacturers, see M. Zabochen’, “Otkrytki – propagandisty,” *Tvorchestvo*, 10 (1965): 24. Ukrainian Commune is mentioned in Iakov Belitskii and Georgii N. Glezer, *Otkrytka prodolzhaet rasskaz* (Moscow: Radio i sviaz’, 1982), p. 7.

20. The difficulties faced by peasants and soldiers as they struggled with Bolshevik language are documented in Ia. Shafir, *Gazeta i derevnia* (Moscow: Krasnaia nov’, 1923) and N. Werth, *La vie quotidienne des paysans russes de la révolution à la collectivization* (Paris: Hachette, 1984). Velikanova’s research using OGPU documents shows that even in 1924 – when publicity about Lenin was at its height – some Red Army recruits from Siberia did not know who he was. Olga Velikanova, *Making of an Idol: On Uses of Lenin* (Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt Verlag, 1996), p. 38.

21. O.N. Bukharov, *Marki iz starogo al'boma* (Moscow: Radio i sviaz’, 1981), p. 104.

22. N. Safonov and V. Karlinskii, *Pis'mo otpravliaetsia v put': rasskazy o zarozhdenii i razviii otechestvennoi pochty* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sviaz', 1965), p. 50.

lution. Other postcards printed snippets from his speeches on their backs. On occasion, the manufacturers even relied on photographs of Lenin taken from the police archives, thereby associating Lenin with what Iain Lauchlan has termed the “Okhrana Myth.” This myth of an omniscient police state with omnipresent agents created, in Lauchlan’s words, “a fairly blank canvas on which the opposition could project a definition of its own political antithesis.”<sup>23</sup> While this impression of the Okhrana circulated in the late imperial period, it picked up more steam after February 1917 since it offered a justification for the collapse of the old regime. The postcards that used police photographs identified Lenin as an active opponent of the Tsarist regime and cast his life in heroic terms. They also served as the starting point for the cult of Lenin.

### The death of Lenin

A second wave of Lenin materials, after the Kaplan assassination attempt, coincided with the deterioration of his health, beginning in 1922. It reached its apex in the months following his death in January 1924. Lenin had already been given extended leave by the Politburo starting in mid-1921. In May of the next year, he suffered his first stroke and ceased to be involved in the day-to-day running of the government.<sup>24</sup> The remaining Soviet leaders feared that if the true state of Lenin’s health was revealed to the public, it might weaken their own grip on power. This was especially true of Zinoviev and Kamenev who, with disastrous long-term results, linked their status to decades of intimacy with Lenin.<sup>25</sup> At this point, it is important to note the turbulence of the immediate post-revolutionary period. Only the year before Soviet leaders faced threats from both the Kronstadt uprising and the Tambov revolt. The country’s economic direction had changed course with the adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in March 1921, but that had led to layoffs for hundreds of thousands of workers. Moreover, the party was not united behind NEP. Trotsky and his followers, among others, continued to argue that the country was on the wrong economic path and to criticize what they saw as dangerous threats to democracy within the party. Hence, deep

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23. Iain Lauchlan, “Separate Realm? The Okhrana Myth and Imperial Russian ‘Otherness’, 1881-1912,” in *Imperial and National Identities in Pre-Revolutionary, Soviet, and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed. C.J. Chulos and J. Remy (Helsinki: SKS, 2002), pp. 77.

24. Volkogonov’s biography has a lengthy discussion of the decline of Lenin’s health, even to the point of quoting the diaries kept by his doctors. See Volkogonov, *Lenin*, pp. 409-35.

25. See Alexis E. Pogorelskin, “Kamenev in Early NEP: The Twelfth Party Congress,” in *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom Revisited: Essays in Russian History and Culture in Honor of Robert O. Crumney*, eds. C. Dunning, R. Martin & D. Rowland (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2008).

divisions wracked the leadership just as Lenin's health gave way. Lenin therefore lost not only his health but also control of his public image. For its own sake, the Soviet leadership decided to deliberately mislead the population. While regular bulletins were issued after March 1923, they did not reveal the true state of Lenin's health. Volkogonov goes so far as to say: "From the published bulletins, it was impossible to guess Lenin's real condition."<sup>26</sup> The bulletins reproduced in his biography of Lenin all contain the word "improvement," despite the fact that by 1923 Lenin, in fact, lay dying.

In addition to the bulletins on Lenin's health, the central press published special supplements that featured photographs of Lenin on vacation. Later, for the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution, *Pravda's* supplement included photographs of him back at work. The caption of one picture even read: "At his post with renewed strength."<sup>27</sup> This type of image, where Lenin was dressed in a simple suit either reading or working at his desk, became a mainstay of the cult. [Figure 1] This postcard reproduced a photograph taken by P. A. Otsup in Lenin's Kremlin office on 16 October 1918. The image employed the trope of "ruler as bureaucrat," as it is described by Peter Burke with reference to Jacques-Louis David's painting of Napoleon at his desk. Burke writes that the painting "presented a relatively new aspect of power, the ruler as bureaucrat, tied to his desk even in the small hours of the morning (a candle has been lit and the clock shows nearly quarter past four)."<sup>28</sup> The pictures of Lenin in this pose suggested his untiring devotion to the Bolshevik cause, always at work for the good of the people. They also reassured the population that Lenin, clearly recovered from all ailments, remained at his desk running the country.

Once Lenin died, obviously this charade could not be maintained. New kinds of images were needed and the most disparate groups joined the commemorative fray as quickly as possible, sometimes combining their efforts at remembrance with other more practical goals. The postcard in Figure 2 was one of the first to appear after Lenin's death. Published by the People's Commissariat of Health (*Narkomzdrav*), proceeds from its sale raised money for maternity and children's hospitals. The simple handwritten text told viewers that Lenin had died – a point reinforced by the black rim around his portrait – but that Leninism would live on in the hearts of workers and peasants.

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26. Volkogonov, *Lenin*, p. 427.

27. Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, p. 117.

28. Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2001), p. 69.



Commemorative albums of postcards were also rushed into production. Some of these projects were successful, while others were stillborn. The Lenin Institute, for example, compiled a postcard album in the wake of Lenin's death. However, the volume never went into mass production. Its failure may be linked to two decrees issued by the Central Executive Committee. The first, issued on 15 February 1924 ordered all photographers who had Lenin materials, either individual portraits or group photographs, to give their negatives to the Lenin Institute. The second, dated 24 April 1924, made it a criminal offense to reproduce, sell or publicly exhibit portraits of Lenin without the permission of one of the subcommittees of the Immortalization Commission that had been created to control the growing cult of Lenin.<sup>29</sup> No description of the postcard album's contents has been published so it is impossible to say what was objectionable about it. The only copy of it was eventually given to Krupskaya.

While this project never came to fruition, others did. The state film agency's 1924 postcard album "Ilich" is a good example. The album had a print run of 15,000 copies and drew on *Goskino's* library of film stills for its twenty-two postcards and two drawings of Lenin.<sup>30</sup> The front cover, which is reproduced in *Rasskazy ob otkrytkakh*, included a photograph of Lenin as a child alongside the more familiar image of him as a grown man.<sup>31</sup>

Prior to his death, pictures of Lenin as a child were exceedingly rare. They soon became a standard feature of the cult, especially as it reached out to younger audiences. In the 1920s pictures postcards by Gosizdat reprinted photographs of a young Vladimir Ilich in his gymnasium uniform, with his family in 1879, and with his sister in 1874. Sometimes the images were cropped so that they appeared to be only individual portraits of Lenin.<sup>32</sup>

Postcards became staples of the burgeoning number of Lenin corners, particularly in schools where the displays relied heavily on visual materials like busts, photographs, portraits, and postcards. In fact, prior to his death, picture postcards already adorned the very first Lenin corners. For example, they were given out at the Lenin corner at the All-Russian Agricultural and Domestic-Industrial Exhibition, held in August 1923.<sup>33</sup> Postcards were easily printed and readily disseminated. They met an immedi-

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29. On 28 March 1924 the Commission on Funerals was renamed the Commission for the Immortalization of the Memory of V. I. Ul'ianov (Lenin).

30. Belitskii and Glezer, *Rasskazy ob otkrytkakh*, p. 19.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

32. The photographs are listed – and their use on postcards noted – in *Lenin: Sobranie fotografii i kinokadrov*, vol. 1. 3rd ed. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Panorama', 1990). I am grateful to Lars Lih for bringing this work to my attention.

33. Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, pp. 126-27.

ate need for images when Lenin's death transformed the cult he had regarded with such discomfort into a source of legitimacy and stability for the regime.

Picture postcards served an equally practical purpose: they documented Lenin's funeral as well as the outpouring of mourning at the popular level that his death triggered. All stages of Lenin's funeral – from the transporting of the body from Gorky to its housing in a mausoleum on Moscow's Red Square – were photographed. The images were then distributed in picture postcard form. Postcards lent themselves to this task because seriality had been a feature in their production from the time that the first picture postcards came onto the market in the 1880s.<sup>34</sup> A 1917 series of documentary postcards, where the postcards were numbered to fix the images in a particular order, created what Peter Burke refers to as “narrative strips,” which helped to establish the chronology and memory of the revolution.<sup>35</sup> Seven years later, postcards did the same for Lenin's death and funeral.

**Figure 3**, for example, shows Lenin's body lying in state in the Hall of Columns in the House of Trade Unions in Moscow. The photograph is simple and somber. Rather than use a close-up which could have injected a ghoulish, macabre note to the scene, the image instead places Lenin's corpse at a dignified distance from the viewer. Other images focused on the mass response to Lenin's death. **Figure 4** exemplifies this kind of postcard. According to the details given on verso, the photograph shows a funeral procession in Lenin's honor as it passes through Leningrad's Square of Fallen Revolutionaries on 27 January 1924. Reproducing photographs of events quickly and cheaply in postcard form facilitated the circulation of their message. In this instance, funerals as state events were constituted part of Bolshevik political culture. Lenin, like the official mourning at his demise, legitimized the regime with solemnity.

Picture postcards also provided a photographic record of the efforts to construct a fitting tomb for the dead leader. Within a week of Lenin's death, the regime erected a temporary wooden mausoleum to display Lenin's body to the public on Red Square. At this point, his body was not yet

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34. As my research as well as work by Hubertus Jahn and Stephen Norris has shown, postcard series depicted romantic – and in some cases sexual – encounters as well as more serious subjects such as the course of a battle in wartime. On picture postcards as well as other visual media and wartime patriotism, see Nina Baburina, *Russkii plakat pervoi mirovoi voyny* (Moscow: Iskustvo i kul'tura, 1992); Hubertus Jahn, *Patriotic Culture in Russia during World War I* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995); and Stephen Norris, *A War of Images: Russian Popular Prints, Wartime Culture, and National Identity, 1812-1945* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 2006). Other kinds of picture postcards will be discussed in my “Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard, 1880-1922” (in progress).

35. Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, p. 152.

embalmed. Debate over how to honor Lenin divided the leadership. According to Ilya Zbarsky, the son of a scientist involved in preserving Lenin's body, those discussions began following Lenin's last visit to the Kremlin on 18 October 1923 when it became evident that Lenin was dying.<sup>36</sup> Once it was decided to preserve the body, the scientific procedures needed to do so had to be devised and some work needed to be done to reverse the signs of decay that were already in evidence.<sup>37</sup> In March 1924, the mausoleum was closed so that the preservation process could commence. Once the body was ready, a second wooden mausoleum was built. [Figure 5] It opened to the public in July 1924 and, for the next five years, served as the focal point for the cult of Lenin. The red and black granite structure that still stands on Red Square today replaced it in 1930. [Figure 6] Picture postcards depicted the emerging prominence of the structure honoring Lenin's body.

With the construction of the mausoleum, the cult of Lenin acquired a spatial focus. Whereas Lenin corners, and their related paraphernalia, diffused the cult across the country, its most sacred relic – Lenin's body – was firmly anchored to Moscow and, within the city's confines, to Red Square. Red Square, as home to Moscow's Kremlin, constituted a landscape steeped in traditions connected with political power. Even in the Imperial period, when the capital moved to St. Petersburg, Romanov tsars came to Moscow to be crowned. The Bolshevik government buried those killed during their takeover of the city in 1917 on Red Square, and then moved the capital back to Moscow in March 1918, thereby again making its Kremlin the center of the Russian political world.

Hence, placing Lenin's tomb on Red Square solidified his connection with Soviet power even in death. Photographs of the mausoleum conveyed that association of Lenin with power, an idea that transcended death. As the postcards in **Figures 5 and 6** illustrate, it was almost impossible to photograph the mausoleum without including the Kremlin walls and buildings. Although produced in 1926, **Figure 5** should be singled out for its inclusion of the clock tower in the photograph. That particular entryway into the Kremlin became an established symbol of Soviet governmental power in visual propaganda produced in the 1930s. Other images of the mausoleum emphasized the long queues of people waiting to see Lenin's body. The photographs suggested a kind of permanent fu-

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36. Ilya Zbarsky and Samuel Hutchinson, *Lenin's Embalmers* (London: Harvill Press, 1997), pp. 11-13.

37. The first two chapters of Zbarsky and Hutchinson outline these issues in great detail. For more information about the decision to put Lenin's body on display, see Olga Velikanova, *Obraz Lenina v massovom vospriiati sovetskikh liudei po arkhivnym materialam* (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2001), pp. 93-106.

neral. They implied not only that Lenin was sincerely mourned but that the mourners were also devoted to the Soviet state, in perpetuity. In other words, the pictures created an imagined community where everyone supported the current regime, even those who never visited the mausoleum in person but who had to settle for a picture postcard of it.

### Expansion of the cult

A little more than a week after Lenin's death, Nadezhda Krupskaya used the pages of *Pravda* to try to contain the burgeoning deification of her husband.<sup>38</sup> She fought a phenomenon that exploded within popular culture, in part thanks to the picture postcard. Postcard collector Nikolai Spiridonovich Tagrin reminded his readers in an article that all kinds of images could be linked to Lenin.<sup>39</sup> Some postcards, like those in the "Lenin series" issued by the Lenin Institute in 1928, showed places where he had lived, worked, or been imprisoned. In that particular series, Lenin's time in Siberian exile was singled out for attention. Included in the collection were views of Shushenskoe as well as a postcard showing the interior of the house that Lenin had occupied.<sup>40</sup> Other individual postcards and series depicted spaces that had been renamed for Lenin – everything from cities to stadiums and cinemas. And, of course, sculptures of Lenin were widely reproduced on picture postcards. To give some extent of the outpouring, in his fifty-year career, Tagrin collected more than 40,000 postcards that he connected to Lenin in one way or another.<sup>41</sup>

But popular culture's embrace of Lenin's image did not invest it with political significance. Visual propaganda featuring still-living Soviet leaders, like Stalin, came to eclipse the significance of Lenin's image no matter how popular it was. The representations of Lenin after 1924 emphasized his removal from the active political scene and into a role that can more fittingly be described as inspirational at best. In other words, over the course of the 1920s, Lenin went from being a mourned leader whose ideas still had some resonance in current political debates to becoming a deified, ossified, irrelevant figure. A 1926 postcard of a park in Kislovodsk typifies the shift in roles. [Figure 7] Issued as #14 in a series on the Caucasus, the postcard includes a bas-relief of Lenin that is so far in the background that it is difficult to make out. Clearly, it is not the focal point of the image. Even though buried at the doorstep of the Kremlin,

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38. *Pravda*, 27 Jan. 1924, p. 3. Krupskaya's speech was reprinted without change on 30 Jan. 1924, p. 5.

39. N. Tagrin, "Obraz Lenin v illiustrirovannoi otkrytke," *Sovetskaia knizhnaia trgovlia*, 4 (1960): 8-10.

40. Belitskii and Glezer, *Rasskazy ob otkrytkakh*, pp. 8-10.

41. N. Tagrin, *Mir v otkrytke* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1978), p. 89.

Lenin's image in death took on a diminished political role as those who had made their political careers with him fell from power and went into opposition.

A sense of this change can be garnered from a close examination of Gosizdat's postcard catalogue from 1930. The catalogue listed, with examples, every picture postcard produced by the state publishing house that year. It reproduced fifty-two portraits of Soviet leaders in postcard form that year.<sup>42</sup> The figures included both photographs and drawings. Only one of the fifty-two was of Lenin. His wife – usually considered by historians to be a marginal figure in the Soviet leadership – received twice that number. Seven compositions were of Stalin. Lenin appeared far more often in sculptural form. There were two postcards showing sculptures of him, apparently without any background detail to fix them in particular locations, as well as other scenic postcards that included Lenin statues as part of their landscape. Interestingly, a large number of these were views of cities in Central Asia, including Andizhan, Ashkabad, Aulie-Ata, Bukhara, and Tashkent. Most Soviet citizens would never visit those places, but the use of Lenin statues gave a kind of uniformity – consistent with Soviet cultural imperialism – to these landscapes.

As James von Geldern points out, monuments like these “are marked by an extended sense of time and space, which is suggested by a stability and durability of form.”<sup>43</sup> Statues of Lenin erected throughout peripheral regions performed a legitimizing function since they linked these places to a central state historical narrative and suggested the permanence of their incorporation into the Soviet state.

In addition to postcards of statues, there were other structures that commemorated Lenin. Postcards showed sanatoria named for him in Kislovodsk, a “Lenin” theatre in Novorossiisk, and a boat named “Ulianov-Lenin” navigating the Volga River. A final postcard in the section of the catalogue devoted to views of Leningrad showed the apartment building where he lived with the Elizarovs in 1917. If “Lenin lives,” as the regime proclaimed, by 1930 he did so in stone and frozen in time.

## Conclusion

Soviet postcards reveal a political truth: the heyday of the Lenin cult was over by 1926. The Immortalization Commission was shut down in May and the number of published works devoted to Lenin fell off dramatically.<sup>44</sup> After Gosizdat's *Lenin.Album.100 Photographs* came out it in

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42. *Otkrytye pis'ma: catalog* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo RSFSR, 1930). Portraits of Soviet leaders are listed on pp 79-80.

43. von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920*, p. 46.

44. See the charts in Velikanova, *Making of an Idol*, pp. 156-57.

1927, it was thirty years before another collection of Lenin photographs was published. Why did Lenin's image lose its original significance by 1926? A number of factors surely contributed. At the most basic level, the survival of the regime after Lenin's death reduced the fears of social instability and violent upheaval that had plagued the leadership in the immediate aftermath of Lenin's death. Hence, the image of Lenin was no longer needed to provide the stability, continuity and political immutability that it had appeared to 1924. Moreover, those who had made their careers with Lenin and used that association to legitimize their claim to leadership for themselves had gone into political opposition. Kamenev and Zinoviev had tremulously clung to an emerging cult of Lenin, which they did so much to create, at the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Party Congresses. But as Alexis Pogorelskin's research reveals, Lenin's image was "a malleable construct that revealed weakness as much as it imparted strength."<sup>45</sup> For Kamenev and Zinoviev, invoking the memory of Lenin only made them appear incapable of independent thought and leadership. For Stalin, his rivals and their mentor were better off forgotten or at least political neutralized.

Another factor also operated. The next generation of Soviet leaders was already beginning to debate changing the country's economic course. Given Lenin's strong association with NEP, abandoning it in favor of a new policy would, of course, find some reflection in Soviet propaganda. When the First Five Year Plan was announced, it was firmly tied to a living leader, Iosef Stalin, rather than to Lenin. The picture postcard, so familiar and accessible, took on another role under Stalin.

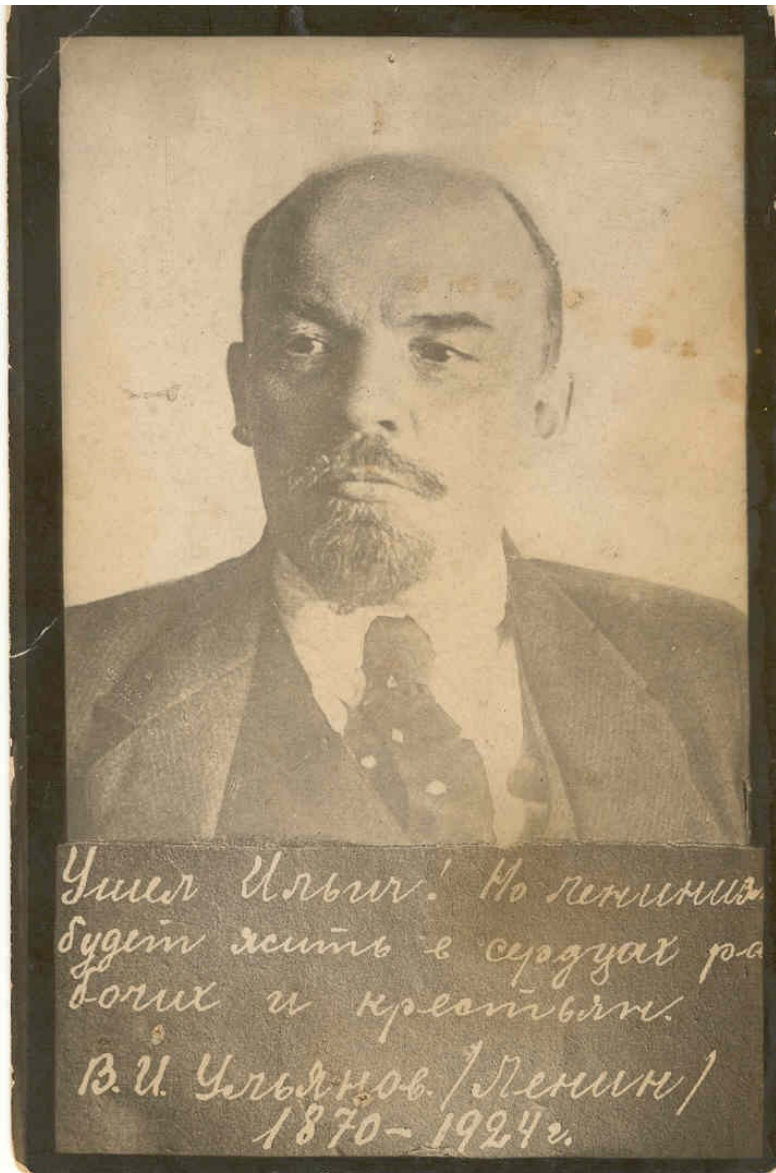
*Concordia University*

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45. Pogorelskin, "Kamenev in Early NEP," p. 177.



**Figure 1:**“Lenin as Bureaucrat,” Soiuzfoto-Fotokhudozhnik, 1938. Author’s collection.



**Figure 2:** One of the first Lenin postcards to appear after his death. Narkomdrav, 1924. Author's collection.

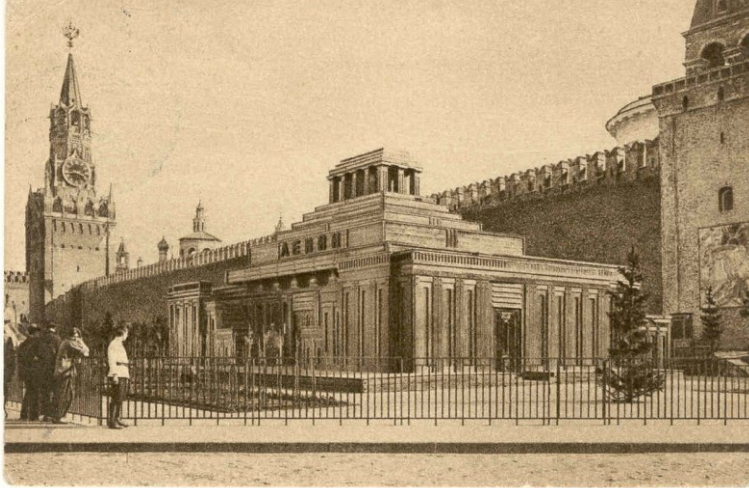




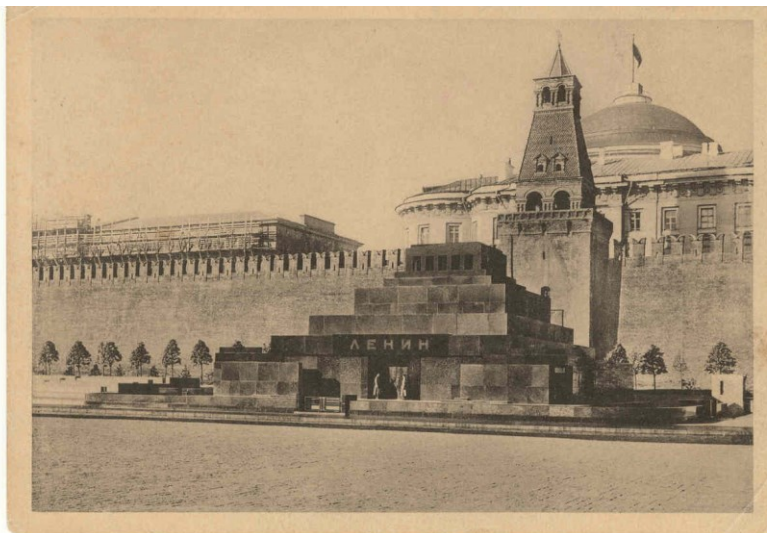
**Figure 3:** Lenin's body lying in state. No manufacturer listed, 1924. Author's collection.



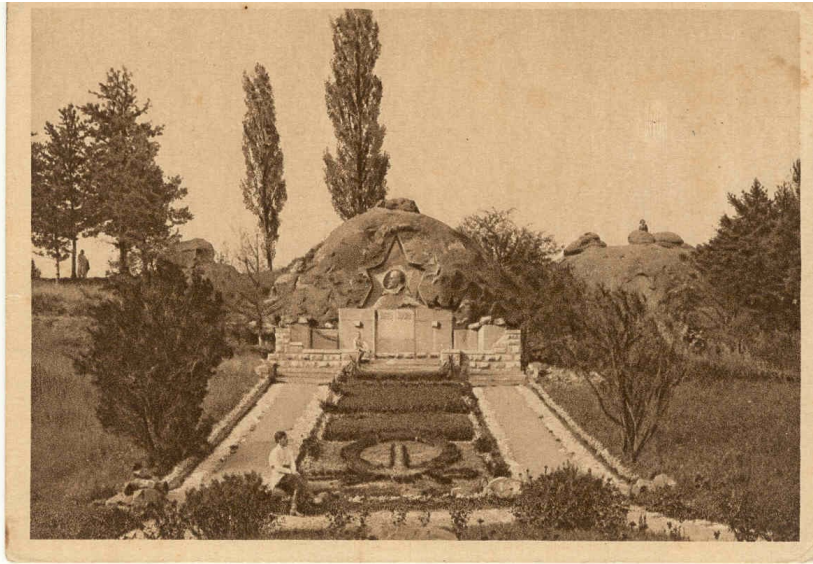
**Figure 4:** Procession in honor of Lenin's funeral. No manufacturer listed, 1924. Author's collection.



**Figure 5:** Lenin Mausoleum. Izдание Moskovskogo Kommunal'nogo Khoziaistva, 1926. Author's collection.



**Figure 6:** The granite Mausoleum. Izдание TsIK SSSR, 1932. Author's collection.



**Figure 7:** Park in Kislovodsk, part of the “Caucasus Series.” Izдание Goznak, 1926. Author’s collection.